

A Breakdown of Our ManMaker Camp Philosophy and Practices

Trial by Ordeal

One of the purposes of our ManMaker camps is to stretch and challenge our young participants to reach and attain a new level of masculine maturity and authentic manhood. We put a lot of thought into making the camp feel as if it is a trial-by-ordeal. By that we mean this: in Medieval days, during the time of the inquisition, trial-by-ordeal was literally that: a trial as in court of law. Such trials were done to prove the guilt or innocence of sorcerers, devil worshippers and witches! Such trials used either water or fire. In knighthood days, trial-by-ordeal served a different purpose: it was a test of manhood, a “creaming” process whereby the best men among men were separated from the herd, so to speak, and these qualified for knighthood training, and finally – knighthood itself. This is the context, of course, for the ordeals that test the hardihood and fortitude and spirit of our young campers.

One of our ordeals is our ManMaker obstacle course made up of a series of challenging, physical obstacles which an individual or team must navigate through and overcome, usually while being timed. Obstacle courses often include running, climbing, jumping, crawling and balancing elements with the aim of testing endurance, strength, and heart-attitude. Trial-by-ordeals need to be tough enough to stretch a boy to do what he, up till that moment, never challenged himself to do, if he is to transition from boyhood to manhood. We often teach the boys at our camps certain mottos on manhood, one of which is: “You need to break the boy to make the man.” The words below are not my words but were taken from a website belonging to a man making organization called Threshold Passages, a rites of passage organization:

For thousands of years men have initiated boys into adulthood. The need for initiation and mentoring is hard-wired in men and boys. Over the last few hundred years these traditions have been lost. Boys have always needed initiation rituals to help them transition from being boys, to firmly entering the path to manhood. It is at this intersection they need some mentors and teachers who are not within their direct family system, such as parents, step parents, guardians, etc.

As they begin to mature and transition away towards independence from this family system, they need models of adult (and older teens) men who they can be real with and who will support them without judgment. Also, each boy comes to this life with a mission. But our society (especially without these rituals and mentors) tends to steer boys away from their true missions. It is easy to get lost, lose direction, and to wander into unskillful and sometimes even dangerous territory in search for their initiation and true paths. Teenage boys need good men as role

models and mentors to help them see options and weigh consequences to make good choices.

Threshold Passages creates a unique place where boys between the ages of 12 and 17 can regularly interact with dedicated, conscientious adult men with the understanding that each boy can become a man of honor. Threshold Passages helps boys discover their own individual strengths, talents and gifts. Caring men model positive masculine behavior and challenge boys to act responsibly to others and themselves. Equipped with this information, boys can then develop positive life skills and goals that can be expressed in their lives and shared within their community.

We support this kind of man making philosophy. At our ManMaker camps, we present challenges that test the endurance, problem-solving skills, teamwork, dexterity, and willpower of our young men. It is out of the shards and pieces of naive boyhood that the steel spine and velvet demeanor of a true man is forged. And our ManMaker camps are exactly that: a forge. The old Spartans believed a man was born out of a forge, and therefore had fire in his heart; fire in his soul, and fire in his eyes. They believed that this sacred energy needed bellows to make it hotter so that each man might find out how dangerous he could be if he needed to be, and what his creative potential was at its highest, and what his breaking point was (concerning endurance), so that when called upon, he would be like a lion of fire loosed upon his world to defend against an enemy, build an empire, or endure whatever the world might throw at him for the sake of others.

A young man's sense of significance and self-worth is often more directly defined by his actions in the larger social and work world, than by his actions as a father and husband. In the book - What Could He Be Thinking: How a Man's Mind Really Works, Michael Gurian writes "*...the life of a male...begins in the male brain's drive to prove worth against all wounding, all hardship, all challenges.*" Without a proper outlet for a boy to test, challenge and stretch himself; to take risks, and suffer pain and failure, he will be left with these inner yearnings and drives pent up and frustrated within him, causing him to become less effective if not in some cases, dangerous in his home.

For boys to become men they have to be tested, banged up, bruised and hurt. **Their wounds need to be calculated and limited, of course.** But they cannot become men without a danger to be faced, a risk to be taken, and the experience of pain and discomfort. In other words, they cannot leave the ranks of boyhood and cross over into manhood without experiencing some kind of focused, intentional pain that is an essential element in all rites of passage. For boys to be able to find a sense of identity, meaning and purpose, they need to go through something that makes them feel they earned it. If there is a sense of risk and danger, all the better; if there is physical exertion, and their strength and stamina are pushed to their limit, and there is some scrapes or minor bruises and

¹ Gurian, What Could He Be Thinking: How a Man's Mind Really Works; p. 34

even some blood shed (again I'm talking minor wounds here) all the better.

Rites of Passage

Another purpose of our ManMakers Camp is to challenge and stretch our young campers in regard to the formation of Christian character, Christ-like masculinity and chivalric virtue. At our camp we constantly attempt to expose and correct the two false views of real manhood: the "*girlie man*" (passivity, cowardice and indecisiveness) and the "*He man*" (the caricature of a superficial action hero, which equates masculinity and manhood with power and control, sexual conquest and dominance of the opposite sex, athletic prowess, and the acquiring of money and position).

Our camp teaches that real men allow themselves to love and be loved; accept responsibility, lead courageously and enact justice on behalf of the needy; that real men realize they are built for others, and that the difference between boyhood and manhood is found in two questions: false men ask, "What can you do for me" and an authentic, chivalric man asks, "What can I do for you."

Our ManMaker camps create a "rite of passage" experience designed to encourage young men between the ages of 12-16 to adopt a philosophy of early maturity as well as to assist them in making the transition to responsible adulthood. Our aim is to impart to our young campers a personal code of chivalry that governs their thoughts, manners, behaviors and actions.

Major behavioral changes genuinely take place only after there are major changes in one's character and values. Therefore, we designed the camp with activities, lessons and trainings that were purposed to move these young men through a series of four powerful metaphors that symbolize different stages of growth and personal character development.



The Way of the Parrot is designed to help the camper learn how to listen in such a way that he understands and is able to repeat the things taught to him or learned by him verbatim, which requires humility and meekness in order to be teachable and moldable.

Parrots also are able to not only memorize but also understand the words they say (unlike mocking birds). The difference between a parrot and the mocking bird is found in understanding the difference between repetition for the purpose of memorization and learning, and imitation for the purpose of mimicry and mockery. Things said or taught or shown to young men at this level are to be not only heard, but seen, said, practiced and seized. When they begin to repeat and practice what has been taught to them, the skills, lessons and way of life become theirs to own and to apply whenever they find themselves in need of them. Things taught as concepts, principles and lessons happen at this level.



Activities: (memorizing camp mottos and slogans; listening with the intent to obey what is taught; showing respect for one's authority by being able to repeat or recite what has been taught; heeding warnings; learning to talk the walk)

The Way of the Wolf teaches the difference between wolves, dogs and coyotes. Key characteristics taught and learned at this level have to do with a wolf's resourcefulness and efficiency, especially in difficult situations, and initiative. Wolves are never passive, always alert as it works things out and thinks ahead. It doesn't wait for someone else to rescue it or save it or help it. It assumes responsibility for its own survival and success, even when hunting in a pack (it does its part). In terms of the manly characteristics of Steel and Velvet, the wolf is a good example of steel in that he is a fierce competitor and dangerous opponent; has determination and is resilient and resourceful; and has a strong will to live and be successful. His velvet qualities are few, but one of them is he never wastes his emotional energy, keeping his anger and natural ferocity under control, focusing it on the situation at hand when it calls for it. Lessons taught include: standing up to danger; controlling and focusing anger and fear (courage); bearing up under pain and suffering (patience; endurance; perseverance); learning to be confident in one's surroundings (pre-planning; learning survival skills; etc)

Activities: (bow fire; compass; survival skills; obstacle course; ring of fire; knife making; fishing; climbing and rappelling; Howling at the moon; the "walk of the wolf")



The Way of the Bison or Buffalos is the way of self-sacrifice and personal expendability; empathy; concern for the safety and welfare of others; loyalty to the "tribe" or "clan"; and community, team spirit and inclusiveness). Bison/Buffalos are worthy examples of three universal expectations of authentic, ideal manhood: 1) standing up to danger; 2) bearing up under pain and suffering and 3) sacrificing oneself for the good of others. The way of the Buffalo is the way of self-sacrifice and expendability; empathy and concern for safety and welfare of others; loyalty to one's "tribe"; team spirit and inclusiveness. Bison/Buffalo welcome and accept anyone from a neighboring herd into their family circle. In the way of the Bison/Buffalo, campers are taught living by a chivalric code helps boys and men overcome their natural, self-preservation instincts so that they will do what's best for others and not for themselves. This is the "wow" factor in authentic, ideal manhood.

This level is designed to teach the importance of community and commitment, self-sacrifice and team spirit. Boys who are attempting to attain this level of maturity are expected to support others who are trying to master the other levels as well as getting out their own feelings of frustration, anger and fear in ways that do not damage or unravel the group. They are taught to be inclusive instead of exclusive, by finding those who are ostracized or alone, and bringing them into their circle of friends or group. Activities that require team work, personal sacrifice, and endurance are taught at this level.

Activities: (building a giant trebuchet; Dagohir skirmishes; acts of service; cage ball; obstacle course; team building exercises; camp set up; acts of blessing and support; praying with someone)



The Way of the Owl is our highest level of learning and maturity at our ManMakers camp. It has been designed to teach the importance of deepening and applying what one has learned, so that knowledge becomes wisdom, with the goal that such wisdom can then be imparted to others.

One becomes an owl when one has not only listened and learned to repeat the words spoken to him; but also has begun to apply them and own them as his own wisdom in regards to his survival and resourcefulness, self-restraint and self-control. To learn the ways of the owl, one must learn the ways of the Parrot, Wolf, and Buffalo. Without the heroic, self-sacrificing ways of a Buffalo, one has not come into balance as a man, and therefore is limited in what he can model in his own life, as well as impart to others.

Those who qualify for this highest achievement have learned discretion (to be cautious; careful; sure-footing) on the one hand, restraint, and even concealment (not being a show off; not letting on to all you know or are; ever disclosing the full extent of your abilities). Like an owl.

Activities: (any giving of edifying input, practical advice or counsel; becoming skillful in doing what is taught; displaying a deeper comprehension of what is taught at the camp; learning and practicing a disciplined, devotional life. (all platoon leaders at our camps have achieved owl). Owl-like characteristics are taught through Astronomy; the disciplines of solitude and quietude; being able to share with the camp “who” they are (self-identity) and what their purpose in life is; archery (hand eye coordination); learning

how to “work the Problem” instead of freaking out; dealing with adversity constructively; coming up with a “to do” list of things that will be done after the camp to promote personal transformation and leadership; and the solo camp out

The transitioning from one level to another involves its own ritual and/or rite of passage marking the moment, and presented by his clan members, each of whom will be prepared to say something that adds to the transition, like reminding him how he has mastered the particular animal; what will now be required of him, as well as encouraging words regarding the positive things that were displayed by him in attaining the new level, and what he must do to successfully pass into the next level. A bead representing the particular animal characteristic mastered will be presented and is to be placed on a leather thong alongside of any other animal figures representing their level of maturity and achievement, and placed where it can be seen at all times.

Most campers may not successfully pass through all the above levels the first time at camp. It may take several successive camps to attain to the owl level. Each time a camper comes back for the annual gatherings, they may take up where they left off the year before. All those who pass through all the levels may be invited to return each successive year as a clan leader or camp counselor.

A Sample Campfire story: Extraordinary Men (taken from Steven Lawhead’s Pendragon Cycle)

The story is told by Merlin’s apprentice, Pelleas. It was the summer of Arthur's eleventh year. Merlin had heard about renewed Irish raiding along the western coasts of Britain and wanted to discuss the situation with two other kings, Tewdrig and Meurig, as well as see for himself how things were developing. His friend, king Ectorius (who had taken Arthur in at Merlin’s request in the role of fosterage) with his son Cai along with a small escort, made the trip with Merlin, Pelleas and Arthur. Lawhead creates what happens next through the narrative of Merlin.

All went well until we reached Yr Widdfa. Upon seeing those great cold looming mounds of slate, Arthur nearly fell off his horse in astonishment. 'Look at that one! Have you ever seen a higher mountain? There is snow still on it!'

'It is a sight indeed,' agreed Merlin.

'Does it have a name? What is it?'

'It does. All this is Yr Widdfa, Region of Snows.' Merlin pointed to the highest peak. 'The one you are gawking at is Eryri.'

'It is. . . ' he searched for words, ' . . . enormous! Enormous and beautiful.' He gazed in wonder at it, filling his eyes with the sight. 'Has anyone ever

climbed it?'

The question caught Merlin off guard. 'I do not believe so,' he answered. 'I do not think it possible.'

That was the wrong thing to say, certainly. 'Good! Then I will be the first,' Arthur declared. He meant it, too. And he meant to begin at once. With a lash of the reins, he rode towards the mountain.

Merlin made to call him back. But Cai intervened. 'Please, Lord Emrys, I would like to climb it, too.'

'You, Cai?' Merlin turned and looked into the ruddy face. The clear blue eyes held all the hope any one human creature can bear. To dash it would have been unthinkable.

And Merlin saw that, much as Arthur wanted to climb the mountain, Cai wanted it more, but for a far different reason.

Merlin gives Cai the nod to climb the mountain with Arthur, and a beautiful story of friendship and camaraderie unfolds as the two conquer the mountain. But things did not go so well with Ectorius (Ector). The king had become over-protective of Cai over the years due to the fact that Cai was lame in his left leg, the result of a poorly set bone after a horse riding accident. In the unfolding narrative, Ector, coming across much like a mother would at any thing that her son would do that involved risk and danger, throws a fit.

'Now, Caius, you cannot —' began Ectorius.

Merlin cut him short with a gesture. 'Of course,' Merlin told him, 'I think it is time this mountain was conquered. And you two are just the men to do it. Well, hurry or you will be left behind.' He waved Cai away, and the boy rode after Arthur.

'Do you think it wise?' asked Ectorius, watching his son with some apprehension..

'No,' replied Merlin, 'it is foolishness itself to let them go.'

'Then why —?'

*Merlin smiled, lifting a hand to the mountain. **'Because if we prevented them now they would never again risk the impossible with a whole and open heart.'***

'Is that so important?'

'For ordinary men, no.' Merlin shook his head, watching the boys ride away. ***'But, Ector, we are not about making ordinary men.'***

This is true for training today's young boys. The Christian church of the 21st century is not in need of, nor has it been called to make mere, ordinary men. It has been called by the Almighty to be in the business of making extra-ordinary men who will "risk the impossible with a whole and open heart." Men who live their lives by a righteous standard whose purpose is to mold them into uncommon, unimpeachable men of action; men, who like the sons of Issachar, are aware of the times in which they lived and what those times demand of them in terms of character, leadership and duty.